

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUND NO. 5-5604
FRED BROWN/DACCA

MARCH 13, 1978

BIHARI CAMPS VISITED

ANNCR:

NEARLY SEVEN YEARS AFTER THE BANGLADESH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, SOME THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND BIHARIS WHO CHOSE TO REMAIN PAKISTANIS ARE STILL WAITING THERE TO GO TO THE PROMISED LAND. V-O-A CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN VISITED SOME OF THEIR PRIVATE REFUGEE CAMPS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF DACCA AND HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

TEXT:

AT THE FOUR LARGEST CAMPS I TOURED, HOUSING MORE THAN FORTY THOUSAND REFUGEES IN ALL, I WAS GREETED WITH HUNDREDS OF HOMEMADE SIGNS AND POSTERS BEARING SUCH SLOGANS AS "WE ARE STRANDED PAKISTANIS," AND "IMMEDIATE TOTAL REPATRIATION IS THE ONLY SOLUTION." AS I MADE MY WAY THROUGH THE NARROW ALLEYWAYS BETWEEN THE SHACKS WHERE THE BIHARIS HAVE BEEN LIVING, AS MANY AS THIRTY-FIVE FAMILIES TO A SINGLE MODERATE SIZE BUILDING, I WAS CONSTANTLY MOBBED BY EXCITED MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN -- SOME SHOUTING, SOME PLEADING, SOME WEEPING. ONLY A FEW SPOKE ENGLISH, BUT ONE WORD CAME THROUGH REPEATEDLY LOUD AND CLEAR "PAKISTAN"... "PAKISTAN".

THEY ARE TELLING YOU THAT THEY WANT TO GO TO PAKISTAN, MY INTERPRETOR TOLD ME. ONE OLD WOMAN WHO MUST HAVE BEEN IN HER EIGHTIES WAS UNABLE TO STAND WITHOUT ASSISTANCE. ALL OF HER FAMILY, I WAS TOLD, WAS EITHER DEAD OR IN PAKISTAN. HER ONLY HOPE WAS THAT SHE WOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE IT TO PAKISTAN IN TIME TO BE BURIED THERE.

THE PLIGHT OF THE BIHARIS STEMS FROM THE FACT THAT DURING THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, THEY FOUGHT ON THE SIDE OF THE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT. AS MANY AS FIFTY THOUSAND BIHARIS JOINED THE ARMY TO FIGHT INDEPENDENCE. THOUGH THE BIHARIS DENIED IT, THE BENGALIS CLAIM THAT MANY BIHARIS ALSO JOINED PAKISTANI SOLDIERS IN BRUTAL MASS KILLINGS IN WHICH MANY BENGALIS DIED.

BOTH GROUPS ARE MOSLEMS, BUT THE BIHARIS FIRST CAME TO WHAT WAS EAST PAKISTAN FROM INDIA AFTER THE PARTITION OF NINETEEN FORTY-SEVEN. BECAUSE THE WEST PAKISTANI ADMINISTRATORS TRUSTED THEM MORE THAN THEY DID THE MORE REBELLIOUS BENGALIS, THE BIHARIS TENDED TO FARE BETTER. AND BY THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE, MANY BIHARIS HAD BETTER JOBS AND BETTER HOMES THAN THEIR BENGALI NEIGHBORS.

WHEN THE WAR ENDED, THE BENGALIS EXACTED A HARSH REVENGE FOR THE BIHARIS' ACTIONS DURING THE WAR. THE BIHARIS FLED THEIR HOMES AND TOOK REFUGE IN A DOZEN REFUGEE CAMPS SCATTERED AROUND THE COUNTRY. THEIR HOMES AND BUSINESSES WERE CONFISCATED AS ENEMY PROPERTY AND BENGALIS WERE MOVED IN IN THEIR PLACES.

TODAY THEIR SITUATION HAS IMPROVED CONSIDERABLY. I SAW NO EVIDENCE OF SEVERE MALNUTRITION, ALTHOUGH THE MAINSTAY OF THE DIET FOR MANY BIHARIS IS STILL THE MONTHLY WHEAT RATION SUPPLIED BY THE GOVERNMENT. BIHARIS NOW CAN MOVE FREELY OUTSIDE THEIR CAMPS WITHOUT FEAR, AND MANY HAVE FOUND JOBS AS MENIAL LABORERS OR RICKSHAW PEDDLERS. HOWEVER, THEIR DESIRE TO LEAVE BANGLADESH HAS NOT LESSENER. WE SACRIFICED EVERYTHING FOR PAKISTAN, THE BIHARIS TELL YOU, AND PAKISTAN HAS A MORAL AS WELL AS LEGAL REPONSIBILITY TO ACCEPT US.

JS/RCS